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A ‘Bag for Life’ – using multidisciplinary approaches in design pedagogy to develop global citizenship

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Biographies

Aysar Ghassan

Aysar Ghassan is an Associate Senior Lecturer on the BA (Hons) Design for Industry and BA (Hons) Transportation Design programmes as well as a design practitioner and design writer. He has worked as a stylist in Automotive Design studios across Europe.

With a background in the social sciences, Aysar is engaged in incorporating Anthropology and contemporary global issues into the design curriculum and his research. He is involved in international pedagogic collaborations and has a keen interest in branding, advertising and form development.

Aysar has recently edited and produced a book for first year design students with the assistance of a bursary from the University of Northumbria CETL ‘Action for Learning’ initiative. A virtual version can be accessed at: <http://www.designcollaboration.org/fullcircle.php>

Gill Rowe

Gill is a first year tutor with a half time teaching commitment on the BA (Hons) Fashion and MA Design programmes. She also has a School role as Head of Quality Assurance and Enhancement.

Currently, Gill is working to support the design of product and artefacts through the Sustainability and Equitable Development project ‘Interventions in India’s Rural Craft Industry’ which is funded through the Development of Programmes in Higher Education (DeIPHE) scheme. The project is designed to support the development of indigenous, localised, networked and structured womens’ craft enterprises and to undertake initiatives to assist economic advancement and to facilitate the process of social equity and eco-efficient innovation.

Abstract

As the need to integrate approaches to sustainable thinking and global citizenship into design pedagogy becomes ever more pressing, a multi disciplinary project has been initiated at Northumbria University’s School of Design to address these issues. Students from different design subject areas worked together in order to develop a set of artefacts and clothing to deal with the challenges of a seemingly pessimistic future global environmental scenario. This paper considers the learning outcomes of this pilot, presents a critical reflection on the methodology underpinning the approach and raises some fundamental questions about perspective in design pedagogy and design activism.

Introduction

There is strong scientific evidence underpinning the debate on contemporary environmental issues and an increasing realisation that if nothing is done to curtail global warming the possibilities for natural disasters and their negative effects on life on earth are greatly increased (Heinberg, 2003; Leggett, 2005; Schellnhuber, 2006; Stern, 2009).

Indeed, the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) have concluded

“...our demands continue to escalate, driven by the relentless growth in human population and in individual consumption. Our global footprint now exceeds the world’s capacity to regenerate by about 30 per cent. If our demands on the planet continue at the same rate, by the mid-2030s we will need the equivalent of two planets to maintain our lifestyles.” (WWF, 2008: p.1).

It can be argued that a fundamental activity in design practice is the creation of artefacts central to the continuation of consumerism. Therefore activities which concentrate on furthering critical and contextual discussion in design pedagogy via engaging students in critical enquiry and reflection should be seen as central to the curriculum. With this in mind, we recognise that future responsible design practice rests on the current generation of higher education students being aware of the issues relevant to developing what has been termed ‘global citizenship’.

The term ‘global citizenship’ is linked to ‘globalisation’, which, according to Falk (1993) can be split into two distinct camps. *‘Globalisation-from-above [reflects] the collaboration between leading states and the main agents of capital formation.’* For activists such as environmentalists, this type of globalisation can be interpreted as being patriarchal or imperialistic, a ‘New World Order’, a *‘conception based on beneficiaries and victims, inclusion and exclusion’*, *‘presuppos[ing] the sustainability of high-growth capitalism’* in the pursuit of *‘disseminat[ing] a consumerist ethos’* (Falk, 1993, p.39-40).

The second type, *‘globalisation-from-below’* can be seen to be a reaction to the former and is fuelled by, amongst other things, *‘environmental concerns, human rights [and] hostility to patriarchy’* (Falk, 1993, p.39) and aims to build a ‘One World community’ (Falk, 1993, p.50), a ‘global civil society’ (Falk, 1993, p.39).

Given that issues pertinent to politics, economics, corporations, society, ethics and the environment are referred to in these definitions of Globalisation, defining what is actually meant by ‘global citizenship’ is a complicated process. Insight towards gaining an understanding of what is meant by this term is provided by Oxfam:

“We see the Global Citizen as someone who:

- *Is aware of the wider world and has a sense of their own role as a world citizen*
- *Respects and values diversity*
- *Has an understanding of how the world works economically, politically, socially, culturally technologically, and environmentally*
- *Is outraged by social injustice*
- *Participates in and contributes to the community at a range of levels from the local to the global*
- *Is willing to act to make the world a more equitable and sustainable place*
- *Takes responsibility for their actions”*

(Oxfam, 1997 in Davies 2007, p.7)

Davies (2007) argues that the word ‘citizenship’ in the term ‘global citizenship’ is important in working towards attaining a better understanding as it ‘implies a more active role’ (Davies, 2007, p.6). It is the motivation to take a participatory role in the outcome of global affairs which appears key to the term global citizenship. Given that globalisation-from-above appears to denote a negative impact on much of the world’s population and the environment, one can assume that in this paper we are concerned with what might be termed ‘benevolent global citizenship’ which is related to globalisation-from-below.

Design is a diverse discipline and we argue that its practice can be seen to relate to aspects of Oxfam’s definition of global citizenship. For example, when an individual considers that he or she should ‘take responsibility for their actions’, should they, as a potential design practitioner, consider working for a company which makes use of child labour in the manufacturing of some of its consumer goods in developing nations? The aspect of global citizenship addressed in the ‘Bag For Life’ project relates to issues surrounding pressing environmental concerns. Indeed, with this in mind, one can infer that, for the purposes of this paper, the *Earth* (from which are taken the non-renewable constituents (commodities) used in the pursuit of consumerism) can be viewed, with reference to Falk (1993), as a ‘victim’ of globalisation-from-above. The aim of the ‘Bag For Life’ project was to stimulate discussion amongst students as to the effects decades of mass consumerism has had, and is continuing to have, on the environment and to facilitate the recognition that *action* is key to addressing this issue.

The value of introducing education on environmental matters into the secondary school curriculum has been acknowledged:

“Education for sustainable development enables people to develop the knowledge, values and skills to participate in decisions about the way we do things individually and collectively, both locally and globally, that will improve the quality of life now without damaging the planet for the future.” (The Council for Environmental Education, 1998 in Davies, 2006, p.15).

In agreeing with this premise, it is appropriate to continue this process at HE level. These matters (along with all issues related to global citizenship) become especially pertinent in design degree programmes in which students are introduced to the processes of ‘mass manufacture’. As future practitioners, it can be argued that, without change, current students may soon be about to contribute to the further depletion of the Earth’s resources (and Global Warming and Climate Change) via being involved in the promotion of further industrialisation.

The Bag for Life Project

In order to facilitate, promote and embed relevant debate at the beginning of a student’s journey through their undergraduate education it is sensible to suggest that issues pertinent to global citizenship should be raised in their first year of study. Many of the current first year learning experiences in the School revolve around discipline-specific studio-based teaching. Information is delivered by the tutor and projects are largely focussed on the acquisition of practical skills. Delivery methods have been developed to enable the management of increasingly large cohorts of students, but in doing this, the facilitation of group based work is often based on the ‘average’ students’ ability. Tutor activity is often designed to be supported by technical demonstration. This can mean that students who lack independent study skills are either left behind or held back by the pace of delivery. Reid and Davies (2000), in their phenomenographic study of student and teacher views about what design is and how it should be learned, reported that studio based teaching, which is ideally student centred and collaborative, is considered by some tutors to be an instructional activity and tutor, rather than student, led. Data from several sources have identified issues surrounding studio teaching and how it does not, in reality, always support the long held ideal that it develops student independence. Tutor and student feedback suggests that in the School of Design, we need to work in a different way; necessitating a shift in tutor and student behaviour.

In developing the ‘Bag for Life’ project¹ one of our goals was to put students, not tutors, at the centre of the learning activity and to encourage learning through peer engagement rather than via staff intervention. We hoped to promote a more autonomous, active approach to the project rather than having the students responding to information and opinions provided by tutors. We were also mindful of the need for *action* which is central to the values of Global Citizenship, but being aware of the fact that ‘green topics’ are ever present in the media, we did not want the students to feel as though this project was another ‘sermon’ on environmental issues.

Rather than delivering information on environmental issues, we agreed to start the project by taking into account what students already knew, what concerned them and what they could ‘find out’ regarding issues related to global citizenship. One of our aims was for students to share knowledge with each other and, ideally, to develop and use it to affect their personal behaviour and future lives as designer practitioners. We also hoped to engage students from different disciplines together, working in small groups, so that they could share discipline specific information as they engaged in contextual discussions about design and sustainability. The delivery of the project drew upon Falchikov’s theories of peer tutoring (Falchikov, 2001) to facilitate the development of peer support mechanisms in same-level student cohorts, though our aim was to apply this approach to cross-disciplinary student groups. We did not want students to simply regurgitate facts or tutor views but to engage in a participatory learning experience which would encourage the development of self-directed enquiry and critical thinking skills with relation to issues connected to sustainability.

First year students from three undergraduate programmes (Transportation Design BA (Hons), Design For Industry BA (Hons) and Fashion Design BA (Hons) participated in the ‘Bag for Life’ project. The cohort was comprised predominantly of domestic students; those students not from the UK were from ‘Western’ Europe or from developed countries in the Far East or other parts of Asia. All participants were familiar with a developed system of consumerism where a variety of goods and services are readily available. It was therefore felt that in order to facilitate comprehension of the chosen aspect of global citizenship, a ‘jolt’ was necessary to remove students from their usual surroundings. The value of the individual student being removed from their ‘comfort zone’ has been argued as being an important part of the experience of personal development in higher education:

“The whole experience of higher education is meant to be stimulating and challenging. Students should not be shielded from the rigours of debate, criticism and controversy; they will not thank us if we wrap them in cotton wool and contrive to ensure that they may undergo the experience without coming to any harm. Risk is the essence of the experience.” (Earwaker, 1992, p.124).

This ‘jolt’ would come in the form of the scenario that was presented to them and in which they would have to place themselves to fulfil the requirements of the brief. With the knowledge that the scenario was removed from the day-to-day lives of the cohort, and in order to provide greater contextual relevance, we set the age of the ‘protagonists’ in the scenario at 18, the age, within a year, of the vast majority of the participants. The basis of this scenario was agreed upon after reflection on the film ‘The Age of Stupid’ (2009) which provides a ‘plausible’ (Met Office, 2010) prediction of the negative effects over-industrialisation may have on the Earth’s climate systems. The scenario is given below:

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“It’s 2055, environmental damage has scarred the planet and global warming is irreversible. Natural resources are at a critically low level and power supplies are increasingly unreliable and intermittent. This brings ‘consumer culture’ to an end. At the age of 18, citizens are presented with a package containing 10 ‘product’ & 10 ‘textile’ items that will sustain them through the rest of their life. In groups of three you are asked to discuss and present the items that will be in your bag. You will be asked to justify your decision with regards to what you feel makes up the social, cultural, political economic, environmental and technological context.”

Attendance for Transportation Design and Design for Industry students was mandatory but voluntary for Fashion Design students. The project was not to be graded and to be delivered in three sessions. Initially, attendance was good with interest generated by what the students perceived to be a ‘spontaneous’ and informal project. Following an introduction to the topic of Global Citizenship, students were allocated to small mixed discipline teams (each containing three individuals) and introduced to the seemingly ‘pessimistic’ future environmental scenario. They were invited to explore emerging issues using the scenario as a catalyst for their discussions and to develop a set of artefacts and clothing to deal with the challenges presented i.e. their ‘Bag for Life’:

The small groups were asked to share their ideas, drawing on their own experience and knowledge of their subject with discussions being facilitated by the project tutors. Following this, the groups were asked to meet independently to discuss their ideas further and formulate proposals for the content of their ‘Bag for Life’.

The second session saw a noticeable drop off in terms of student attendance, especially for Fashion students. Verbal feedback from some of these students informed us that other mandatory, assessed assignments took precedent. The teams presented their response to the scenario, identifying their twenty items and discussing the rationale for their response. The nine ‘strongest’ teams (three from each presentation group) were selected by peer review (students used ‘sticky notes’ to indicate the strongest proposals within their presentation group and were precluded from voting for their own team). The selected teams were given the opportunity to develop their proposals further in the light of any peer and tutor feedback. Students were asked to complete feedback questionnaires at the end of this session. The nine, final, team proposals were exhibited to the School. Finalists gave oral and visual presentations and the best presentation was chosen by peer review (again students were not able to vote for their own team). Group members were asked to provide additional written feedback at the end of the project.

Analysis of the project

The discussion in the remainder of this paper will draw upon analysis of the feedback given by students. There was a good response rate in terms of the written feedback provided by students who attended all the sessions and also some valuable verbal feedback from students who chose not to attend the second and third session. Academic support from project tutors was *deliberately* ‘hands off’ to encourage peer mentoring and the autonomous creation of narratives. Placing the students in an ‘uncomfortable’ situation was a key part of the methodology of this project.

The ‘mixed’ group approach was an important aspect of the project. Operational difficulties in arranging interdisciplinary projects are reflected in the fact that, currently, this type of activity is limited in the School. This project was unique in that cohorts from three different subject areas were engaged in a joint first year project. The value of interdisciplinary work is recognised as a valuable graduate skill. Suarez-Orozco and Sattin (2007) suggest that *‘Interdisciplinary thinking will have a greater premium moving forward because single disciplines can no longer fully address the complex global problems that we face today.’* (Suárez-Orozco and Sattin, 2007, p.60)

The interdisciplinary element of this project resulted in a mixed response from students and, initially, some groups felt uncomfortable about the prospect of working an interdisciplinary manner:

“When we found out that it was fashion students that we were to be paired up with we immediately began to question the subject of the project and how fashion, design for industry and transport design could be interlinked.”

“Another insight was how hard it can be to incorporate the different working methods and techniques fostered by both disciplines effectively.”

This reluctance may have been a contributing factor in the drop in attendance as the project progressed. So too may have been the voluntary attendance accorded to Fashion students for at the time they were approaching a mandatory and assessed ‘deadline’ for another project:

“[Next time] make sure the fashion schedule is not full on the proposed initial and compulsory meeting times as it caused our third member to not be able to turn up, and he simply dropped out of the group.”

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Despite these factors, written feedback suggests that many of the students were comfortable with working in interdisciplinary teams and acknowledged the benefits of learning from each other:

“The project provided an opportunity for us to work with other students of a different design discipline. It gave us an insight into how the process of design is manipulated for the various mediums within fashion and allowed us to expand our own knowledge in the relationships between textiles and Industrial Design.”

“When the design for industry and fashion knowledge combined, it gave different insights and perspectives on matters like appearance and functionality of the different items.”

“As a group we enjoyed this assignment, it was both fun and interesting to work with another design course, we learnt from one another but what else was also interesting was seeing how other design disciplines have a different perspective on particular issues and the project as a whole...”

Indeed, with a view to fostering a positive environment for interdisciplinary learning and a sense of community within the School, much feedback on the project was heartening:

“It developed an understanding of the importance of valuing other people’s opinions and views.”

“We worked hard and did not want to let others down.”

“The interaction in our group between Fashion students and DFI and TD students was really strong. Everyone was keen to put forward ideas and it was interesting to hear about design in a different forte.”

Students’ verbal feedback after the second session suggests that the project might have implications regarding an improved sense of belonging. Students observed that it would have been useful to undertake the project earlier in the year while friendship groups were still forming in order to facilitate the facilitation of a positive environment for interdisciplinary learning and for increasing a sense of community within the school.

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As the participating students were all at first year level, the 'Bag For Life' presented an opportunity for what can be termed "same-level" (Fachikov, 2001, in De Wever et al., 2010) peer tutoring as the variation in age between students was negligible. Same-age (and in this case same-level) peer tutoring has great advantages in that it is '*...often reciprocal and students take turns to tutor one another.*' (Roscoe & Chi, 2007, in De Wever et al., 2010, p.351).

Students' written feedback was essential in helping to assess how they recognised whether peer tutoring had taken place. It was encouraging to learn that participants who had shown a high level of involvement had been engaged in cross-disciplinary peer mentoring as well as personal reflection:

"...what else was also interesting was seeing how other design disciplines have a different perspective on particular issues and the project as a whole."

"...working with a fashion student really opened [our] eyes to the textile products and all their useful multifunctional properties that [we] were unaware of."

"It gave us an insight into how the process of design is manipulated for the various mediums ... and allowed us to expand our own knowledge in the relationships between Textiles and Industrial Design."

"We took a lot away from each other; as a DFI student I was unaware of the variations of properties for fabrics e.g. hemp being used to make concrete and the antibacterial properties of bamboo. The fashion student within our group commented on how she learned to consider multiple uses for products and how to problem solve in order to select products for the bag."

"...[we all] had different views and knowledge of different things..."

Some students told us that they did not fully engage with the peer support aspect:

"...there wasn't a huge difference it felt more like us training the [other] students our ways of idea formatting."

"...it was not completed to a standard I would have normally done if working with the same course."

This may have been a reflection of the different personalities or individual confidence levels of the group members, or intransigent issues related to interdisciplinary team work. It also raises the possibility that some students feel their own programme of study is in some way 'superior' to others. These are areas worthy of investigation when this project is run again. It would have been helpful to have explored more about group interaction by coding feedback so that it identified the differing experiences and views of members of the same group. In that way, the possibilities for reaching a more definitive conclusion could have been increased.

As the project brief was very open and challenging, 'making sense of proceedings' was a vital part of its negotiation. Students were encouraged to find their own direction in order to make sense of the brief in their own way through effective use of narrative. The importance of this approach has been recognised:

'Narrative is one of the fundamental sense-making operations of the mind...' (Lodge, 1990, p.4 in McDury and Alterio, 2002, p.31)

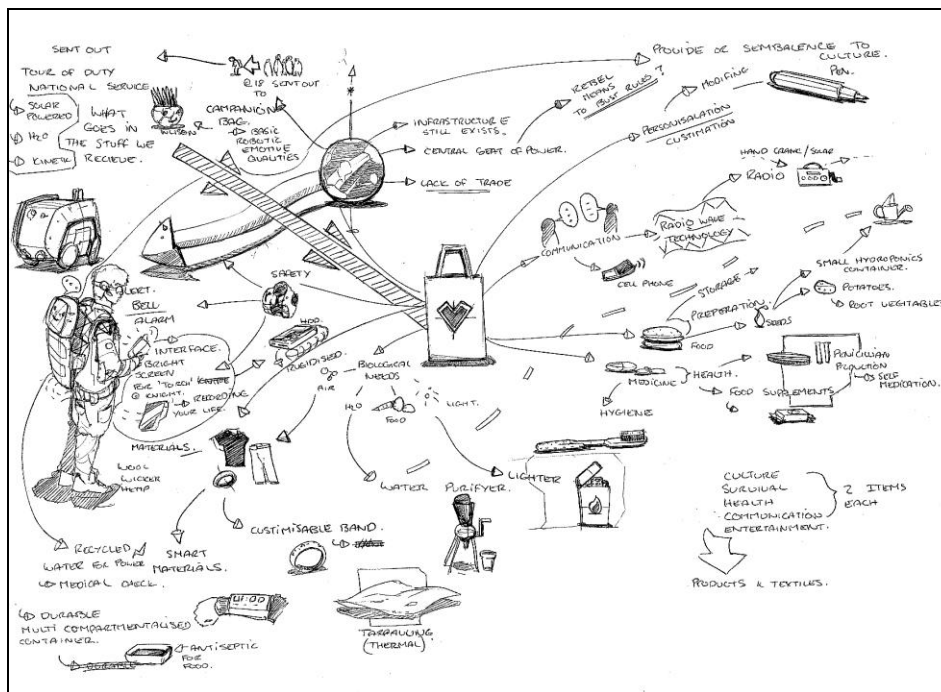
Teams who showed a high level of engagement with this project made use of critical thinking to create innovative narratives to make sense of the greatly changed local, national and global context inferred through the 'Bag For Life' scenario:

"The reason why we decided to develop on the Neanderthal concept was due to idea that the Neanderthal species are an example of those who lived through a number of global changes ... (which seemed relevant to this project). As a group we wanted to create a pack that could be used and adapted to any future scenario, we thought that if the bag contained back to basic objects the individual could be more creative and imaginative with each object finding various uses for each. What seems like not a lot could be so much more with a bit of creativity and imagination."

"To begin with a discussion took place about the ten products and textile items chosen. Some issues kept repeatedly cropping up such as sustainable, multifunctional, durable, modern and personal... It was decided that with the majority of the group being 18 they should design a bag to go to boys and girls when they turn 18. This meant that the group could put themselves in the mindset of a bag receiver."²

'Storytelling is a uniquely human experience that enables us to convey, through the language of words, aspects of ourselves and others, and the worlds, real or imagined, that we inhabit.' (McDury and Alterio, 2002, p.31). 'The language of words' noted by McDury and Alterio (2002) above is vital, but it is important to add that in a discipline such as Design, which often focuses on visual presentation, these visual means can also contribute to the narration of a story. Therefore, it was crucial for students to have the opportunity to mix verbal and visual storytelling methods. Unprompted, many chose to present narrative boards (Figure 1) which told the story of their imagined scenario:

Figure 1: student narrative



Feedback from this group added to the sense that effective storytelling was an important part of 'making sense' of this project:

"Our back-story concept for the 'Bag For Life' scheme involved a retro-evolved world, where the meaning of civilisation was just a forgotten memory."

At its heart, this project was initiated to promote debate and the consideration of the pressing issue of Global Citizenship. Feedback suggests that the project had an effect on the ways many first year students view this topic in relation to the consequences of a pervasive 'consumer society' and how students, consumers and designers might respond to it:

“I believe that this project has been worthwhile as it really makes you think about the world of tomorrow and shows how different everyone’s thoughts can be.”

“The bag for life brief really brought home the real life possibilities of national disaster such as global warming or running out of resources that could take place in the future.”

“[This project] allowed us to imagine the world in the future if consumerism and resource consumption continues to increase, and think about the consequences this lifestyle could potentially have on generations to come.”

The lack of engagement shown by some students may be also be connected with a reluctance to begin considering a topic as thought provoking as global citizenship, especially as students were so familiar with the system of consumerism in which goods and services are so readily available:

“This scenario seemed a long way off...”

“I think for a lot of people the project was a bit too sci-fi and fantasy...”

The proposals presented by students at the end of the project were varied and interesting, and provided evidence as to the relative level of engagement of the students. Some were based on a ‘survival ethos’ and in these cases the ‘Bag For Life’ typically contained warm and waterproof clothing, a knife and cooking ‘basic’ utensils and items for creating ad hoc shelters. These teams appeared to take a more literal method of interpreting the scenario.

Other teams appeared to be more engaged in viewing this project as a vehicle to develop their critical thinking with regards global citizenship. The importance of this approach has been recognised as students should aim to ‘...develop the skills, sensibilities, and competencies needed to identify, analyze, and solve problems from multiple perspectives...’ (Suárez-Orozco and Sattin, 2007, p.60). And as such “...schools must nurture students who are curious, can tolerate ambiguity, and can synthesize knowledge within and across disciplines.’ (Suárez-Orozco and Sattin, 2007, p.61). Some of this critical thinking can be evidenced in the students’ final presentations:

“The adverse weather conditions continued. The UK was left as one of the only habitable countries. Mass immigration began. The army was called in to act as

border control. Many immigrants brought disease due to the lack of hygiene and nutrition. A screening process was instigated.”

“The original poster was translated into different languages such as French, Dutch, Chinese and Arabic as it was felt this would help people to realise this will take place worldwide.”

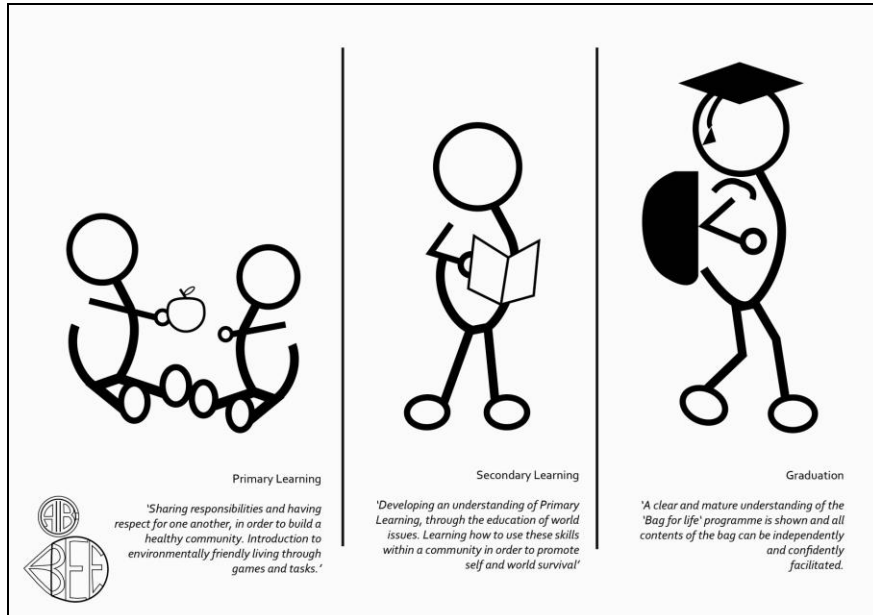
“We decided to focus on the effect the lack of resources would have, particularly in the energy producing sector. We never imagined that a world low on resources and power would be a particularly positive place to be in and therefore painted a fairly negative picture.”

Through analysis of written student feedback, we believe that the ‘hands off’ approach encouraged students to find their own direction in order to make sense of the brief in their own way. Indeed, for those who showed a high level of engagement, the discussion stretched beyond the intended focus on environmental issues to incorporate more aspects of Global Citizenship. The fact that Global Citizenship implies *action* (Davies, 2007) was most aptly shown by the group that was chosen as the winners of this project:

“As a group [we] decided to set an alternative context to that given within the brief. One that did not unveil a future of suffering and loss of hope, but one that looks at the world today and focuses on changing today to avoid such a future.

The way in which we aimed to prevent such a future was through the art of education. It is education that taught us as a child; not to play near the roads; or not to drop litter. Therefore it made sense to introduce a curriculum that would teach the adults of the future how to care for and preserve the planet, the economy and society as a whole.”

Figure 2: optimistic and socially inclusive narrative by winning group.



This team's decision to turn what for many teams was a 'negative' scenario into a positive one was appreciated by the student cohort and selected as the most appropriate solution to the brief by their peers.

The peer response to the 'winning' group's proposal (figure 2) suggests that there is value in students being encouraged to create their own narratives in order to explore this pressing issue. It may be a cliché to state this, but the project raised awareness that, on a personal and professional level, the future is in their hands. Tiger (2000) suggests that through the 'developed' cultures' preoccupation with consumerism, it is easy to devalue what might be termed the more important pleasures humans can enjoy. Instead of industrialised nations focusing on the importance of Gross Domestic Product, they should begin to take into account the 'Gross Domestic Pleasure', indeed the '*celebration of necessity*' (Tiger, 2000, p.273) in order to make for a more fulfilled population.

One of these necessities is the teaching and passing down of worthy principles to the next generation. The selection of the winning group suggests that, without tutor intervention, this notion has ultimately been understood by the majority of student participants in stage three of the project. This is indeed an encouraging sign.

The celebration of necessity is a very positive notion and the value of creating an optimistic and positive narrative in order to begin to tackle issues such as those suggested by the brief cannot be underestimated:

“[Positive psychology] must be informed by a vision of what a good human life contains. Thus a positive psychology will have to be willing to tell people that, say, a good meaningful productive human life includes commitment to education, commitment to family and to other social groups, commitment to excellence in one’s activities, commitment to virtues such as honesty, loyalty, courage, and justice in one’s dealings with others and so on.” (Schwartz, 2000, p.409)

The School of Design has high aspirations for its students. Our aim is to produce graduates who will grow to be leaders and an understanding and appreciation of what might be described as ‘higher needs’ is recognised as a vital factor in the process of what is termed Transformational Leadership:

“Transformational leadership is more powerful and inspiring. The Transformational leaders speak to higher level needs – the need to belong, to feel good about oneself, and to reach one’s full potential. They spotlight values that are more likely to mobilise and energise followers like equity, liberty, justice, freedom. In the process, these leaders change the very nature of the group, the organisation or the society.” (Johnson, 2007, p.182)

Being versed in the language of ‘higher needs’ will be an important factor in business in the future and the World Business Council For Sustainable Development [WBCSD] (WBCSD, 2008) believe that at the forefront of business in 2020 will be those addressing issues relating to Global Citizenship.

Conclusion

The ‘Bag For Life’ pilot project was a unique one at Level 4 in the School of Design at Northumbria University as it brought together students from different subject areas to tackle a challenging scenario related to Global Citizenship. Feedback has indicated that many students gained from working in an interdisciplinary manner and that some developed critical thinking skills through attempting to negotiate the brief. Many students felt that the Bag For Life pilot had facilitated their reflection with regards the negative consequences that mass-consumerism has had on the environment and some students went beyond the intended remit envisaged at the conception of the project to discuss wider issues related to Global Citizenship. Such examples include reflection regarding the possible migration of population and the winning team’s concentration on encouraging the teaching and embedding of a socially inclusive ‘new beginning’ for young humans are particularly encouraging to observe. The selection, through peer review of the winning proposal, links in with Davies’ (2007) suggestion that ‘action’ is a necessary part of Global Citizenship.

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Heartened by written feedback from many students suggesting that the pilot should be a staple of the diet of first year study and the fact that, for many students, it has helped develop an increased sense of community within the School, we will be running another interdisciplinary project themed relevant to the theme of Global Citizenship this academic year.

Much has been learnt from reviewing student feedback. We have discussed the need to make the subsequent project mandatory for all participating students and to negotiate relevant, competing operational issues accordingly. Secondly, we feel that it is beneficial to introduce the importance of interdisciplinary thinking and working to first year students (with relevance to tackling matters related to Global Citizenship) prior to the commencement of the project. We hope that these measures will further increase the levels of engagement amongst students. Thirdly, we feel it would be appropriate to code the feedback from students in order to gauge reactions from students from each of the participating programmes of study.

We appreciate the feedback from some student that this project should be set at the beginning of the first year, but are unable to accommodate due to operational matters. This issue does raise a valuable opportunity to discuss the possibility of introducing multidisciplinary induction events within the School of Design.

For the next project we propose introducing a greater range of possible future scenarios for the interdisciplinary cohort to work with, the intention being that the resulting narratives and proposals are even more diverse and the discussion more wide ranging. An example of this is the possible future scenarios envisaged by the UK Government 'think tank' Foresight (Foresight, 2006).

We support Earwaker's (1992) belief that students should not be shielded from risk. In the case of the 'Bag For Life' pilot, this meant initiating a hands-off, challenging and open brief delivered through an interdisciplinary approach at first year level, a 'first' within the School. We recommend that further research is necessary with regards this approach as it provides valuable insights into design teaching and learning practices and the pressing issue of global citizenship.

Footnotes

- 1) We are very grateful to Professor Doug Miller, Chair of Ethical Fashion at the School of Design for his great input into the 'Bag For Life' project and for providing extremely valuable feedback on this paper. We would also like to thank Ben Singleton for his fantastic contribution to this pilot.

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- 2) We feel it is important to note at this stage that this team summarised the feelings of many in validating the decision to set the age of the 'protagonists' in the 'Bag For Life' scenario at 18.

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